

Executive Summary of  
Biological Warfare Improved Response Program  
US Department of Agriculture and Department of Defense  
(USDA/DoD) Workshop, August 10-13, 1999

In response to growing concerns regarding domestic terrorism, the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress passed Public Law 104-201, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997. As a result, the U.S. Army Soldier and Biological Chemical Command was designated the lead agent for Department of Defense and was charged with establishing the Biological Weapons (BW) Improved Response Program (IRP) in partnership with other federal agencies. The BW-IRP program identified, evaluated and demonstrated the best practical approaches to improve BW domestic response through a series of workshops designed with realistic scenarios, which modeled potential threats. A response template was developed by the BW-IRP team that identified the concepts and the specific activities that the city could perform to respond effectively to a BW incident.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and Defense held this workshop to address two general objectives: 1) assess and improve the effectiveness of the BW-IRP strategies and tools; and 2) assess the effectiveness of the identification and response to a food borne BW incident. The participants examined aspects of medical surveillance and outbreak investigation relative to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) mission in food protection to determine the extent to which a bioterrorist incident involving a food product could be identified in time to impact the outcome in terms of minimizing human disease. The participants also focused on the decision-makers' thought processes as a biological emergency unfolds. Day one of the workshop was devoted to briefings and discussions of bioterrorism, potential disease agents and the response tools developed to date by the BW-IRP. Day two was a Biological Tabletop Exercise (BTTX) that focused on the recognition, investigation and intervention strategies needed at the federal, state and local levels to successfully respond to a bioterrorist incident involving interstate food products. Days three and four were devoted to a detailed After Action Review (AAR) of the BTTX and collection of response gaps that require additional study.

The BTTX was a 7-hour interactive exercise consisting of three phases, each portraying a milestone in the response to a biological terrorist attack that targeted a multi-state area of the United States. Phase 1, Medical Surveillance, confronted participants with the challenges of detecting and identifying the existence of a public health emergency. Phase 2, Outbreak

Investigation, encompassed the period immediately following recognition of a public health emergency and initiation of the response to what could be an endemic disease or, possibly, a bio-terrorist incident. Phase 3, Resolution and Disposition, focused on issues associated with multijurisdictional mitigation and restoration efforts.

The workshop provided an excellent opportunity to review the federal, state and local response to a food borne BW incident and provide input into how USDA can revise the federal response to a food-borne BW incident. The workshop participants (\*see list below) were able to identify strengths and weaknesses in their surveillance, investigation and response to an incident of this type. The workshop also helped to establish communication links between the various USDA agencies that would be involved in a food-borne or agricultural BW incident. The participants gained insights into the roles and responsibilities of the various federal, state and local agencies that would be involved. These insights will serve to enhance the national capability to respond to BW incidents. Specific suggestions to improve the BW response template were also obtained during the course of the workshop.

\*Organizations represented at this workshop

- a) U.S. Army Soldier and Biological Chemical Command; U.S. Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases; U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine; National Guard Bureau - Weapons of Mass Destruction Section;
- b) U.S. Department of Agriculture - Undersecretary for Food Safety; Emergency Coordinator; Office of the Inspector General; Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; Food Safety Inspection Service; Agricultural Research Service;
- c) Department of Health and Human Services - Office of Emergency Preparedness; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Federal Drug Administration;
- d) General Accounting Office;
- e) U.S. Air Force - Force Protection Battle Laboratory  
Federal Bureau of Investigation - National Domestic Preparedness Office; Weapons of Mass Destruction Response Unit;
- f) State of Maryland Department of Agriculture;
- g) Baltimore City Emergency Medical Service;
- h) Anne Arundel County Emergency Medical Service;
- i) Food Safety Consulting International; and
- j) Franklin Square Hospital